



SIKH COUNCIL OF CENTRAL CALIFORNIA

'RECOGNIZE YE ALL THE HUMAN RACE AS ONE'

Guru Gobind Singh Ji

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Dr. Thomas Adams, Executive Director
Instructional Quality Commission (IQC)
Curriculum Framework and Instructional Resource Division
California Department of Education
1430 N Street, Room 3207
Sacramento, Ca 95813

Dear Dr. Adams and members of the IQC,

My name is Pashaura Singh Dhillon and I live in Madera, California. I am a co-founder of the Sikh Council of Central California (SCCC), a non-profit organization representing 13 major Gurduaras (Sikh Temples) in the Central Valley. I have been involved with the California legislators since 2010, when the first Assembly Concurrent Resolution designating November as Sikh Awareness & Appreciation Month was passed. I was trained as a landscape architect from the Landscape Institute London and have retired working on UN funded environmental projects in many countries half around the world. I am also a poet and a singer and write about human rights and environmental matters.

I was raised by Sohan Singh Bhakna in Punjab-India, who migrated from Punjab to America in 1909 and worked in the lumber mills along the Columbia River basin near Portland in Oregon. Sohan Singh was the founding president of the historic Ghadar Party formed in Astoria in 1913. Since I grew up under his care, apart from reading about it; I had heard from him the stories of extreme hardships of early migrants to Canada and America, founding of the Ghadar Party, sacrifices made by the Ghadrates and the inhuman treatment meted out to the immigrants from India aboard the ship, "Koma Gata Maru."

As an SCCC member, I have been offering my input for the ongoing development of curriculum framework with the California Department of Education. I have presented testimonies to the Curriculum Commission that was set up for updating the California History - Social Science Framework. The Sikh American community is pleased with the initiative to include Punjabi Sikh contribution to California's history and I am happy to suggest changes for the 6-8 Grade curriculums:

"The Gold Rush in California and agricultural labor in Hawaii spurred Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Filipino, Hindu, and Sikh South Asian (Hindu and Sikh) immigration to the United States. Eventually the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) and the Immigration Act of 1917 greatly limited Asian entry to the United States. California built the immigration station at Angel Island to facilitate the process of Asian admissions." (Page 241)

The above paragraph needs the following clarification:

"Sikh South Asian" is misleading. "South Asian" encompasses many cultures and countries whereas the Sikhs, who migrated during this time period, were exclusively from Punjab. The "Hindu and Sikh" written in parenthesis is also misleading as it implies as if

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Hindus and Sikhs immigrated in equal numbers, which is factually inaccurate. I agree with Professor Jaideep Singh's recommended change to "add the word Punjabi before Sikhs and Muslims, who are not even mentioned here.

There is no mention of the Ghadar Movement in this paragraph:

This important political organization called the Ghadar Party which took its name after its newspaper named 'Ghadar' (Mutiny) was formed in Astoria by the pioneer Indian immigrants in April 1913. It moved its office to San Francisco soon after and published its first newspaper, "Ghadar" on November 1, the same year. The Ghadar Party played an influential role in India's Independence struggle.

To introduce the Ghadar party to students as a suggested change by the Hindu American Foundation (HAF) is a nice idea. The HAF's phrasing and terminology as suggested is problematic, which re-interprets history to suggest Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs migrated to California in equal numbers. But their introduction of the Ghadar party is particularly troublesome. The Hindu American Foundation writes, "In fact, the Ghadar party was co-founded by the Berkeley based Hindu Association of the Pacific Coast led by Bengali activist Tarak Nath Das." The name of the Association was the Hindi (not Hindu) Association of the Pacific Coast and it denoted a national identity, not a religious one. To clarify it further, the term Hindu, sometimes spelled "Hindoo" was used by the media at that time to describe one and all from India, the majority of whom were Punjabi Sikh.

While there were prominent Sikh, Muslim and Hindu members who were highly educated and considered part of the elite educated class, who aided to build the movement, the Ghadar Party was never an "intellectual movement" or led by any particular individual activist in this capacity. It was essentially a worker movement that was founded and driven by their collective wisdom, awareness of human rights and patriotism that no one could bring together in India at that time to fight the British occupation. They also strongly advocated the innate rights of the immigrant workers here in America and elsewhere. The Ghadar Party grew out of the inhuman treatment and miserable plight of Indian workers at home in British India as well as heavy discrimination and prejudice meted out to them in insults and hate crimes abroad. The Ghadar Party was largely initiated, manned and funded by the Punjabi Sikh millworkers in Oregon and farm labor and railroad workers in California, who remained the backbone of the Ghadar Party. For complex reasons, Punjabi Sikhs immigrated to California from Punjab, India under the British Rule in large numbers at the advent of the 20th century and paid a very heavy price when most of them returned to India as Ghadrates to fight the British occupation, a few years later.

But all this simple talk of how many Sikhs and Hindus and Muslims in the Ghadar Party goes against the spirit of the Ghadar movement. There is nothing simple about their religions and ethnicity statistics of the Ghadar Party either. What is important is that all were unified and welcome in the cause of ending British colonialism and liberating their shared homeland India, which happened in 1947. But to suggest that Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus all contributed equally to this movement is a distortion of history.

Thank You,

Sincerely,

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